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Viewing cable 05LIMA2158, COCALEROS ATTRACTIVE TO POLITICAL GROUPS BUT

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
05LIMA2158	2005-05-12 18:49	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Lima

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LIMA 002158

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/11/2014

TAGS: [SNAR](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PE](#)

SUBJECT: COCALEROS ATTRACTIVE TO POLITICAL GROUPS BUT
NARCOTRAFFICKERS GIVE THEM ALL THE SUPPORT THEY NEED

REF: A. LIMA 2055

[1](#)B. LIMA 1929

[1](#)C. LIMA 1794

[1](#)D. LIMA 1712

[1](#)E. LIMA 1418

Classified By: PolCouns Alexander Margulies. Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Although the various cocalero groups remain fragmented with no national leadership or strategy, they are courted by disparate radical elements in Peruvian society who view the cocaleros as potential allies. In addition, there is evidence that narcotraffickers are arming and radicalizing cocaleros creating an increasing threat to eradication teams. Bolivian followers of Evo Morales are traveling widely in the Apurimac and Ene river valleys (VRAE) area to garner support for a MAS-style Peruvian cocalero party. A coca researcher's recent visit to the VRAE during the last two weeks of April found cocaleros eager to be the ones to down a helicopter. The Peruvian National Police (PNP) are responding with interdiction operations in the Upper Huallaga Valleys and VRAE, and they plan a prolonged eradication operation in the area of recent helicopter attacks in Polvora-Pizana area of San Martin. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) In the wake of the fizzled Third Cocalero Congress (Ref E), cocalero organizations have still failed to develop an effective national strategy or organization. However, cocaleros constitute an increasingly vocal single-issue bloc in their own areas, and local cocalero power is turning some districts into no-man's lands that defy the limited capacity of law enforcement to respond; XXXXXXXXXXXX a long time Embassy contact told Poloff on 5/3 of his recent investigation of VRAE coca growing areas; he found his contacts increasingly reluctant to share information as the long reach of narcotraffickers made talking to outsiders risky.

13. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX contacts reported no knowledge of Venezuelan agents in the Apurimac valleys, but they said that Bolivian representatives of the MAS party were frequent visitors. From a trip to Cuzco several weeks earlier, XXXXXXXXXXXX reported that Bolivian MAS representatives were making a heavy recruiting effort. XXXXXXXXXXXX said that the failure of MAS leader Evo Morales to complete a planned trip to Cuzco in early April was the main reason that Cuzco cocaleros did not rally to form a MAS-style party.

14. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX contacts reported that APRA party representatives were also canvassing cocalero areas in Cuzco and the Apurimac Valleys, but that other political parties were not in evidence except for "Peru Ahora," a traditional supporter of cocalero causes. His contacts saw little serious effort by labor unions to court cocaleros in these areas. (Note: Labor centrals and left-wing parties have supported cocalero protests in Lima and other urban areas, but their courtship has not/extended to aggressive outreach to the cocaleros in their home areas. End Note.)

15. (C) What was increasing in the VRAE districts, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, was the takeover of local politics by cocaleros and narcotraffickers. He noted that the creation of new districts in 1992 during the Fujimori era, designed to increase state presence in remote areas, had backfired, with whole districts having city councils and mayoral administrations that favored cocalero interests. Examples were Pichali, Santa Rosa and Sivia districts in the VRAE. The increased buying power of cocaleros was one reason for this infiltration of coca into local politics, fueled by a significant increase in the hectareage under cultivation.

16. (C) Cocalero influence was gradually seeping into provincial and regional politics, XXXXXXXXXXXX continued. (Note: decentralization is bringing increasing control at the regional and provincial level over government financial resources. End Note.) The La Convencion Province (Cuzco Department), for example, recently included in its budget a line item for the "sacred leaf." Ayacucho Regional President Omar Quesada (who in January declared coca a cultural patrimony) did a publicized walking tour in late April to connect with residents abutting a road project running through provincial capital Querobamba (a relatively new province, created in 1986). XXXXXXXXXXXX,s contacts reported that at night Quesada met with cocaleros after his publicized development meetings during the day. In March, Quesada signed a declaration with Ayacucho cocaleros calling on the GOP to suspend all eradication efforts and for an end to alternative development programs. (Note: When PolCouns confronted APRA co-Secretary General Jorge del Castillo with this declaration, the latter stated that this did not reflect APRA's position and that he would take this matter up with the party's political committee. End Note.)

17. (C) The potential for cocalero violence appears to be growing. XXXXXXXXXXXX contacts uniformly reported that narcotraffickers were training and arming cocaleros. Local employment is increasing of non-growers (frequently family members of growers) for trafficking-related tasks such as transporting coca paste with backpacks, driving pack mules, operating maceration pits, manual labor for cocaine labs and joining narcotraffickers as foot soldiers. The cocaleros were increasingly receptive, XXXXXXXXXXXX said, to viewing their coca fields as something worth fighting for and to the offer of arms and firearm training to effect defense of their fields. Cocaine labs were increasing, XXXXXXXXXXXX continued, and the highest-paying jobs went to those entrusted with delivering cocaine to Lima.

18. (C) While XXXXXXXXXXXX,s visit yielded little evidence of direct Sendero Luminoso (SL) activity in the VRAE, the narcotrafficker influence made the area equally dangerous. XXXXXXXXXXXX on this trip was unable to enter areas that he had on previous trips. The contacts that would speak to him reported that any contact with outsiders was increasingly dangerous. Many people have disappeared in recent months, either from running afoul of narcotraffickers or victims of local score-settling that the lawless climate facilitates.

19. (C) The high level of organization that cocaleros have used to menace helicopters on eradication missions further north in the Upper Huallaga River region (Refs A - D) is an indication of an escalation in their organization, training and tactics. In a tactic that has become common during eradication operations over the past weeks, cocaleros hang back during eradication and the initial stages of evacuation of the eradicators and their security elements. When all helicopters have departed save one, and the PNP security is withdrawing to mount the last helicopter, the cocaleros then close in with extensive launching of rocks (up to 2 lbs) from long-range slings. Security police and crew departing from the last helos have reported that the front line of cocaleros will launch their rocks, then crouch so that a second, and then a third line of rock-slingers can launch their

projectiles against the helo cabin and rotor blades.

110. (C) XXXXXXXXXXXX,s visit to the VRAE came after the April 12 attacks to the north (Refs A - D); his contacts reported the wide dissemination of the perceived success by cocaleros and their allies in damaging the helicopters. Groups of cocaleros held parties to celebrate the helicopter attacks. Several contacts noted that in past years SL fighters had poor success in downing Army helicopters
XXXXXXXXXXXX,s contacts further reported that many Apurimac cocaleros in the VRAE expressed hopes that they could be involved in the downing of a helicopter.

111. (C) While so far cocaleros have used sling-launched rocks against eradicators, their security elements and helicopters, XXXXXXXXXXXX painted a disturbing picture for the future. His contacts in the VRAE said that narcotraffickers are arming cocaleros there at an unprecedented rate, either selling modern selective-fire rifles such as FN-FALs and Galils - and even rocket launchers - or giving them the arms as an advance on coca sales. Cocaleros increasingly perceive their interests as an armed resistance to any eradication efforts in the future.

112. (C) National Police chief Marco Miyashiro has noted privately to Emboffs and publicly that the PNP,s current emphasis on interdicting cocaine base laboratories is designed, and to a degree has been successful in delinking coca growers from narcotraffickers. When PNP units strike laboratories, coca growers are torn between protecting their own fields and protecting narcotrafficker production labs. By and large they choose to stay with their fields, and as a result there have been few large-scale protests or assaults on the PNP troops while they are destroying the pits. An ominous sign for the future, however, is the growing trend that coca growers operate their own maceration pits; some may begin a more aggressive defense of their pits.

113. (C) Comment: This report, based chiefly on a well-placed and historically reliable source may not reflect the entire picture but is disturbing. GOP helicopters and eradication teams, as well as alternative development workers, will be put at ever higher risk without action by the government to exert state control over the increasingly lawless coca zones such as the VRAE and Upper Huallaga. The PNP raid of April 24 (Ref B) found evidence that clearly linked the SL and narco-trafficking in the San Martin/Ucayali/Huanuco Departments. Current PNP plans to mount extensive operations where helicopters have been attacked are promising. The PNP is continuing interdiction operations in the Upper Huallaga and in the immediate future, DIRANDRO will deploy 350 counter-narcotic police to the Polvora-Pizana area in support of a prolonged eradication and interdiction operation. In addition, a multi-tiered enforcement operation will begin in the VRAE in June to destroy cocaine-base labs. Enactment of a new coca law that continues to be advanced by some congressmen would probably reinforce the growing power of local and regional coca politicians and give cocaleros an incentive to unite on a national basis; the Embassy will continue to discourage consideration of a coca law on all fronts.

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